

REMARKS

By the foregoing amendments, the feature of claim 30 has been added to claim 24. Accordingly, claim 30 has been canceled. Claims 31 and 32 have also been amended to depend from claim 24 rather than canceled claim 30.

Entry of the foregoing amendments is respectfully requested in the interest of expediting the prosecution and removing the remaining issues from consideration. In this regard, it is submitted that the present amendments to the claims do not raise any additional issues requiring further consideration and/or search by the Examiner. As the Examiner will note, the amendments simply limit the claims to the scope of the subject matter indicated to be allowable in the Office Action dated December 16, 2003 by adding the feature of claim 30 to independent claim 24. No additional features have been added that were not previously claimed. As the subject matter of the present claims was previously under consideration by the Examiner, entry of the foregoing amendments is proper.

Following entry of the above amendments, the status of the claims is as follows (as indicated in the listing of claims set forth above):

Claims 1-23 and 30 stand canceled without prejudice or disclaimer;

Claims 24, 31 and 32 have been currently amended; and,

Claims 24-29 and 31-40 remain pending (16 total claims).

Turning to the Office Action, applicants again acknowledge with appreciation the Examiner's statement that the subject matter of former claims 30-39 (now corresponding to claims 24 and 31-40) is allowable. In the Office Action, claims 24-28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Vaeth et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,869,135) and claim 29 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Vaeth et al. as applied to claims 24-28, and further in view of Kumar et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,521,131).

Request for Clarification of the Claims Status:

In the Office Action dated December 16, 2003, claims 24-39 have been indicated to be pending. However, as noted in applicants' response filed August 14, 2003, claims 24-40 were actually pending at the time since it was necessary to renumber the claims to correct a typographical error in the numbering of the claims. In particular, prior to applicants' amendment of the claims in their response dated August 14, 2003, the claims inadvertently included two claims numbered as "claim 31." The numbering of the claims was therefore corrected by renumbering the second claim "31" as claim "32". Each of the

claims following claim 32 was also renumbered. Claims 24-40 therefore were pending following applicants' response of August 14, 2003, rather than claims 24-39 (as stated in the Office Action).

As noted above, by the present amendments to the claims, the pending claims are claims 24-29 and 31-40. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request that the Examiner kindly acknowledge that the claims have been renumbered according to applicants' response of August 14, 2003.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103:

Claims 24-28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Vaeth et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,869,135). In addition, Claim 29 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Vaeth et al. as applied to claims 24-28, and further in view of Kumar et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,521,131).

Applicants respectfully submit that these rejections are obviated for the following reasons.

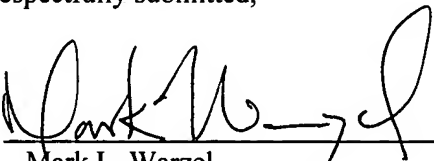
In the Office Action, the subject matter of claims 30-39 has been indicated to be allowable. Claims 30-39 were not rejected over the applied references. Accordingly, by the foregoing amendments, the feature of claim 30 has been added to claim 24-29 and 31-40 to thereby obviate the rejections based upon the applied references.

As the present claims should now be in condition for allowance, a notice to that effect is respectfully and earnestly solicited.

If the Examiner has any questions regarding this Amendment or the application in general, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by phone at (650) 330-4908.

Respectfully submitted,

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